

Brian Tucker (Princeton)

„Und wer bin ich denn?“ Wordplay and Identity  
in Tieck's *William Lovell*

I. Introduction: Reading for Wordplay\*

Ludwig Tieck plays with words. Friedrich Schlegel once noted that, „Tiecks Gedichte sind d[er] Form nach *Wortspiele* und das ist d[ie] Grundlage d[er] romantischen  $\pi$ [Poesie].“<sup>1</sup> The present study focuses on wordplay not in Tieck's poems but in his epistolary novel *William Lovell*<sup>2</sup> (1795). It follows Schlegel's suggestion by examining wordplay as a means of entry into the foundation of Romantic poetics, and it argues that the play of language in this novel insinuates and even determines identity.

What do we mean by wordplay? A brief detour through Tieck's famous tale „Der blonde Eckbert“ will serve to develop a concept of wordplay in Tieck's prose before turning to *William Lovell*. The story demonstrates succinctly how language insinuates identity: Its seemingly insignificant words simultaneously reflect the structures and patterns of the narrative they convey.

„Der blonde Eckbert“ revolves around questions of origin. It first relates the story of Bertha's past and then tries to sort out the various characters' relationships to this narrated past. Several critics have shown how the overlapping origins and complex repetitions are inscribed into the characters' names. The connection between the half-siblings *Eckbert* and *Bertha*, for instance, is indicated through their half-identical names.<sup>3</sup> Another linguistic correspondence indicates the

\* I owe thanks to Fritz Breithaupt and Daniel Magilow. Their suggestions improved the manuscript in numerous places.

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schlegel: Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe [=KA], hg. v. Ernst Behler et al., Paderborn 1958 ff. Bd. XVI, 327, Nr. 878.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Tieck: *William Lovell*: Further citations from this volume appear parenthetically, hg. v. Walter Münz. Stuttgart 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Greiner offers one example of such a reading, „Pathologie des Erzählens. Tiecks Entwurf der Dichtung im ‚Blonden Eckbert‘.“ In: *Deutschunterricht* 39/1 (1971), 111-123, here 116.

story's constitutive *déjà vu* – that *Walther* is really „die *Alte*.“<sup>4</sup> Fritz Breithaupt adds *Bertha's Eltern* to the list of „-alter“ characters and shows that they all occupy the same position in the story: They are betrayed by the „-bert“ characters.<sup>5</sup> The story's dynamic turns on the revelation of suppressed identities, but the playful register of the name already reveals, or at least intimates, these identities. „Wordplay“ thus refers to how Tieck attends closely to the letter of writing and exploits linguistic connections to load seemingly insignificant words with extra import.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the story thematizes reading for precisely this kind of wordplay. Once the past shifts from fact to question, *Bertha* and *Eckbert* must scrutinize all the „unbedeutenden Worten“ and every „unbedeutende Kleinigkeit“ for potential clues that reveal a hidden logic.<sup>7</sup> They suspect throughout that what seem like insignificant surface details in fact yield the traces of an important hidden design.

The problem with this concept of wordplay, though, is that it does not seem to apply to the novel in question. Wordplay in „*Eckbert*“ is a matter of recognizing the hidden significance of apparently insignificant words, whereas the characters in *William Lovell* deride this very kind of reading. Comtesse Blainville, for instance, would despise the minute reading required of (and by) *Eckbert*, as when she proclaims in a moment of exasperation, „dies Jagen nach Wortspielen und Verdrehungen des Sinnes, – o es gibt nichts Häßlicheres, wenn man soeben etwas Venünftiges gesprochen hat“ (76). Here, „wordplay“ does not mean to find an inherent sense hidden in words but, rather, to twist and distort words, to perceive a register of meaning where none exists. Christoph Brecht reinforces this appraisal from a

<sup>4</sup> Maria Tatar notes that, by subtracting „W“ and „h,“ *Walther* becomes *Alter*, the masculine form of „die *Alte*.“ See „Unholy Alliances: Narrative Ambiguity in Tieck's „Der blonde *Eckbert*,““ in: *MLN* 102/3 (1987), 608–626.

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Breithaupt: „Der blonde *Eckbert*, 1797“. In: *Encyclopedia of German Literature*, hg. v. Matthias Konzett. Chicago 2000, Vol. II, 937.

<sup>6</sup> This definition is not imposed on Tieck retroactively. The homophonic names from „*Eckbert*“ qualify as examples of wordplay even according to the standards of Tieck's time. August Bernhardt, who counts Tieck among the founders of a new German poetic language, defines „Wortspiel“ in 1803 as „Die Verknüpfung zweier Sprachphären, welche gleichtönen, wobei aber eine bestimmte Betrachtung der Bedeutung beider vorkommt [...]“. Bernhardt, *Sprachlehre*, Hildesheim 1973, Nachdruck der Ausgabe Berlin 21803, Bd. II, 396. Bernhardt stresses that such phonetic correspondences do not exist for their own, purely musical sake; they draw attention to a more fundamental affinity between two concepts. „Wordplay,“ therefore, does not denote a free play of signifiers in which „anything goes.“ Its phonetic play remains constrained by what one can confirm through meaningful affinity.

<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Tieck: *Werke in vier Bänden*, hg. v. Marianne Thalmann, München, Bd. II, 22.

critical perspective: „Tiecks poetisch am wenigsten verschlüsselte Dichtung ist seine dunkelste, die am meisten rätselhafte.“<sup>8</sup> Although *William Lovell*, according to Brecht, is Tieck's most obscure work, it is also his least encrypted work. It does not require the same kind of decipherment that „Eckbert“ does. In *William Lovell*, words are playful not by dint of a surfeit of meaning but a paucity of meaning. They are *mere* playthings because language always means less than it says.

Despite the assertions of characters and critics, I shall be arguing that *William Lovell* is indeed an encrypted narrative. It employs wordplay similar to that in „Eckbert“ because in this novel, too, Tieck constructs identity through the play of language. Such a reading intervenes in two long-standing discussions surrounding the novel. First, it forces one to reconsider the frequently voiced crisis of communication and the riddle of the incommunicable self. The self is a riddle – but not an insoluble riddle in which the soul is eternally absent from expression. Like any riddle, it is solved by deciphering playfully encrypted signifiers. Second, reading in this way returns to the question of Lovell as a character without character. It shows how Lovell lacks an essential character because the play of language imposes his character, his identity, upon him.

## II. Wordplay in William Lovell

If the novel's characters ridicule the wordplay uncovered in „Eckbert,“ what kind of wordplay do they espouse instead? Balder, the melancholic character most removed from human interaction, formulates it as forcefully as anyone: „der Mensch steht unter dem Affen, eben deswegen, weil er die Sprache hat, denn sie ist die kläglichste und unsinnigste Spielerei [...]“ (208). In *William Lovell*, one plays with words because language is a meaningless game.

One plays this game with either cynical despair or with cynical cunning; one either laments or exploits its insufficiencies. The attitudes of William Lovell and Burton Sr. represent these two positions, respectively, although almost every character comments on the inadequacy of language at one point or another. Lovell, for instance, asks, „Ob ich mit Worten, oder Karten, Definitionen, Würfeln oder Versen spiele, gilt das nicht alles gleich?“ (507). The facets of dice and the signifiers on cards exist independently of any referent; rolling a six

<sup>8</sup> Christoph Brecht: Die gefährliche Rede. Sprachreflexion und Erzählstruktur in der Prosa Ludwig Tiecks. Tübingen 1993, 11.

does not mean six of anything, nor does a queen refer to any real ruler. They are empty signifiers that acquire value only within the chance combinations of a game. Lovell's comparison voices the novel's frequent complaint that words do not correspond adequately to objects in the world. They too have value only through the combinations they strike with other words.

Burton Sr., in contrast, attaches great importance to the play of language, for he sees it as a game played for advantage over (and against) others. He writes in his diary, „Es ist aber, als wenn der Unterricht aller meiner Lehrer, ja selbst meines Vaters, nur dahin ginge, daß ich lügen und mit den Worten spielen lernte“ (395). Rather than lament the disjunction between words and things, Burton uses it to his advantage by concealing his intentions and influencing others through empty eloquence.

From both perspectives, it is a familiar crisis of communicability that reduces language to a mere game. Words cannot convey things adequately and are therefore always detached from the objects or emotions that give rise to them. Christoph Brecht refers to the resulting inauthenticity of language as a „Totalisierung des Rhetorischen.“<sup>9</sup> Burton's totalization of rhetoric has a particular figure in mind, the *captatio benevolentiae*, an expression of flattery employed to win favor. *Captatio benevolentiae* is the figure of linguistic insufficiency when one has no interest in overcoming the disjunction inherent in language, and when one chooses, instead, to exploit it in order to deceive.

Other characters, though, are far less enthusiastic about the inevitable inauthenticity of communication. The refrain recurs often enough to become tiresome. To cite but one of the many examples, William Lovell writes, „Ich wollte Dir so vieles sagen, und weiß nun keine Worte zu finden“ (242). The characters are always at a loss for words because no word can capture what they would like to convey. Those who lament the inadequacy of language find themselves locked in a prison of „dead signs“ (metaphors of criminality permeate the novel) that never lead back to an object. From this pessimistic perspective, the proper figure for words detached from their origin is the riddle. As the wor(l)d-weary William Lovell puts it, „Alles ist ein vorübergehend Rätsel, fades Wortspiel und langweiliger Zeitvertreib.“ (362). Here, wordplay does not provoke close reading. These characters know better than to waste time trying to solve riddles because they are all too aware of the insufficient medium of language.

<sup>9</sup> Brecht (Anm. 8), 25.

The characters in Tieck's novel feel the disjunction between words and things most acutely when they attempt to describe inner states. That is, words are never more detached from their origin than when they are supposed to originate in the self, in emotion, or in the soul. Lovell writes to Amalie: „Mit welchen Worten soll ich die Gefühle ausdrücken, die mein Herz erweitern und zusammenziehen? Kein Zeichen entspricht der lebendigen Glut in meinem Innern [...]“ (61).<sup>10</sup> Lovell's repeated complaints demarcate the self as an interior that cannot be expressed and define it in its imperviousness to language. Roland Borgards, reflecting on Lovell's predicament, writes, „Zwischen Innen und Außen wird nun so scharf geschieden, daß kein Zeichen im Außen dem Gefühl im Innen zu entsprechen vermag [...]“.<sup>11</sup> Or, as Brecht puts it, „Das Individuelle ist niemals in der Sprache.“<sup>12</sup> The incommunicability of the self turns the prevalent metaphor of criminality and incarceration on its head: Language appears as a prison from which the self is locked out.

### III. The Riddle of Identity

William's letters assert that the self is the most obscure origin of language. It is that which cannot be captured in language, which is why the self appears as the riddle par excellence. It appears as a riddle explicitly, as when Andrea asks, „Was kann ich also für meine Seele tun, die wie ein unaufgelöstes Rätsel in mir wohnt?“ (364), but also implicitly in questions such as „O und wer bin ich selbst?“ and „Wer ist das seltsame *Ich*, das sich so mit mir selber herumzankt?“ (324/639). The novel casts the self as a problem to be solved, as a tension to be resolved within the individual. These characters do not idly compare the self to a riddle; by putting it repeatedly in the form of questions – including the one in the title of this paper – they add a sense of urgency to solving the riddle of the self.

At the same time, however, they cast the self as a riddle that cannot be solved. Rosa says of this futility, „Ja wohl, lieber Freund, es ist um

<sup>10</sup> One finds this sophisticated and cynical attitude toward language contrasted in the servant Willy's „naïve“ letters. He writes to his brother, „aber das kannst Du mir doch auf mein Wort glauben, daß sie [meine Briefe] aus dem allerbesten Herzen kommen“ (89). According to the skeptical assertions of other characters, though, letters could never correspond to the heart.

<sup>11</sup> Roland Borgards: *Die Schrift, das Rätsel, der Mensch*. Ludwig Tieck's William Lovell. In: *Athenäum* 8, 1998, 231-253, here 239.

<sup>12</sup> Brecht (Anm. 8), 36.

die Menschen ein seltsames Ding! Ein Rätsel, das keiner je ganz auflösen wird“ (300).<sup>13</sup> Rosa and the novel's other characters define the self negatively as an absence in language: Only its non-appearance proves its existence. The riddle of the self, in this sense, represents an insoluble genitive: It exists only as an incommunicable interior, and successful expression would be its demise. No one will solve this riddle because it inheres in the identity of the self. To dissolve the riddle is to dissolve the self that depends on it.

Roland Borgards also analyzes the relationship between language and incommunicable essence. He finds both language and the human being – the term he uses is „Mensch“ – structured according to the principle of the riddle. He writes: „Lösung und Unlösbarkeit der Aufgabe sind dadurch bestimmt, daß der Mensch und die Schrift nach dem gleichen Modell gedacht werden, in dem die sichtbare, lesbare Oberfläche Zeichen einer unsichtbaren, unlesbaren Tiefe ist.“<sup>14</sup> Borgards's analysis focuses on the depth-hermeneutic split between interior and exterior, surface and depth, and it correctly points up how the characters cast both the empirical body and the surface of language as veils that conceal the depth of the soul. In this way, Borgards complements Brecht's assertion that what is individual is never in language. Indeed, from this perspective, the self (the interior essence of „Mensch“) lacks any external manifestation, since even the body is only a deceptive covering that does not lead to the self. For Lovell, „das Rätsel seines eigenen Ichs“ reiterates the ineluctable predicament of communication, for, like language, it too is constituted by a „fatale Spaltung in Außenfläche und Innentiefe.“<sup>15</sup>

#### IV. The Name in William Lovell, the Name „William Lovell“

Tieck's novel depicts the disjunction between words and things and centers it on the self. Within this context, should not the name be the most problematic kind of word? A name is a completely arbitrary la-

<sup>13</sup> The vocabulary of selfhood in Tieck's novel is inconsistent: the characters refer to the incommunicable entity alternately as the heart, the soul, the I, and the self (see pages 95, 364, 629, and 362). This much is clear: „Mensch,“ as used in the above passage, refers to a composite structure of exterior and interior, while the other terms, although not interchangeable, all refer to the interior essence. The present study uses „self“ throughout, and it takes „identity“ as the problem of self-understanding.

<sup>14</sup> Borgards (Anm. 11), 231. He expounds this thesis in detail on pages 244-248.

<sup>15</sup> Borgards (Anm. 11), 246 and 244.

bel; it has nothing to do with the self to which it refers. In fact, the novel's most cynical and melancholic characters, Andrea and Balder, suggest that it would be possible to forgo naming altogether. Andrea asks:

Was bleibt uns übrig, William, wenn wir alle leere Namen verbannen wollen? – Freilich nichts zu philosophieren und mit Enthusiasmus für die Tugend und gegen das Laster zu reden, kein Stolz, kein Gepränge mit Redensarten, aber immer noch ebenso viel Raum um zu leben. (364)

He assumes that names are empty; they fail, as communicative vehicles, to convey their object. Andrea proposes a simple solution to the totalization of rhetoric: If the names of things are detached from the truth of things, why not simply do away with the useless names? This would require sacrificing the rhetorical splendor of empty expressions, but it would not affect life itself, which is never present in language (in its *dead* signs). Balder implements Andrea's suggestion when he becomes a hermit and retreats from (almost all) human interaction. He writes to Lovell, „Ich weiß nicht in welchem Waldgebirge ich wohne, denn ich erkundige mich nie mehr nach Namen“ (367). The characters in the novel repeatedly ask who they are, but the answer lies not in language, especially not in names.

We can test this logic of the name against William Lovell, certainly the most important case study, since he is the novel's central character, as well as its eponym. His name stands before and above all others. Tieck was well versed in English literature, and numerous scholars have tried to determine the source from which he drew this character's English name.<sup>16</sup> The most likely source of the name Lovell is Ben Johnson's 1629 comedy *The New Inn*, which includes a character named Lovel and corresponds to *William Lovell* in three aspects.<sup>17</sup> First, biographically: Tieck translated other works by John-

<sup>16</sup> Consult Thalmann's notes for a brief synopsis of literary influences on the novel. Ludwig Tieck: Werke, Bd. I, 1022.

<sup>17</sup> Another suggested, though less likely, source is Clara Reeve's 1777 Gothic novel *The Old English Baron*, which also includes a character named Lovel. Walter Münz lists parallels between Reeve's novel and William Lovell. See *Indivium und Symbol*, Bern 1975, 101. If one were forced, perhaps by an ill-conceived exam question, to find a connection between Reeve's novel and Tieck's works, „Der blonde Eckbert“ might actually offer more points of comparison. Characters named Philip and Walter figure prominently in Reeve's novel, and Eckbert's friend is Philipp Walther. Moreover, the themes of knights visiting one another's castles, a noble child raised (unknowingly) by poverty-stricken foster parents, and the supernatural return of the past all demonstrate a stronger bond to the fairy-tale than to William Lovell.

son (*Valpone* and *Epicoene*), and he was involved with his works during the same years that he wrote *William Lovell*.<sup>18</sup> Second, thematically: Both fill the role of a stereotypically melancholic character.<sup>19</sup> Finally and most importantly: The two agree formally, in that both employ expressive names, names that correspond analogically to their characters' types. This common feature of seventeenth-century literature is present in Johnson's comedy, as Love-I is the character who speaks in defense of love; he represents love itself. Tieck's Love-II, in a similar, albeit less platonic fashion, is caught repeatedly in the throes of love. Indeed it seems that he does little in the story except continually fall in love – to Amalie, the Comtesse Blainville, Rosaline, and Emilie.

Thus, Tieck's citation from Johnson does not just borrow a name; it also cites an analogical relationship between name and character, word and thing. When Fritz Wüstling writes, then, that Tieck's character has only a name in common with Johnson's play, he overlooks the relational correspondence of naming in the two works.<sup>20</sup> Like other contemporaneous dramatists, Johnson frequently uses names to indicate character types: *The New Inn* also contains characters such as Prudence, who is circumspect, Ferret, who is clever and quick, and Frampul, who is ill tempered, as the homophonic adjective „fram-pold“ suggests. They all embody the attributes suggested by their names. Tieck, too, makes use of expressive names in his work. In *Peter Lebrecht* – which appeared anonymously, thus giving the name as the author's pseudonym – he writes:

Ich ward in eine mir ganz unbekannte Welt hineingefahren, ohne Menschenkenntnis und Kenntnis meiner selbst, ohne genau zu wissen, wer ich sei; nur mit dem Namen *Lebrecht* ausgestattet, der, wenn er mir auch eigentlich nicht zukam, mir doch immer als Vorschrift dienen konnte, nach der ich handelte.<sup>21</sup>

Lebrecht realizes that his name is not completely expressive; he does not deserve a name that connotes wholesome living. At the same time, though, he does not know clearly who he is (the same central questi-

<sup>18</sup> See Fritz Wüstling: Tiecks *William Lovell*. Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts. Halle 1912, 120 f.

<sup>19</sup> Is it furthermore a thematic coincidence that, in *London*, Lovell ends up „in einem gemeinen Wirtshause, unter den niedrigsten, aber originellsten Menschen“ (421), the same comedic setting as in *The New Inn*?

<sup>20</sup> Wüstling (Anm. 18), 121.

<sup>21</sup> Ludwig Tieck: Werke, Bd. I, 82. See also Bd. I, 96, where Lebrecht reads names such as „*Bärenklau*“ and „*Greifenhahn*“ expressively: „Sie deuten nur auf Raub und Mord und Unterdrückung.“



on in *Lovell*), and he has only his name as a guide. The words embedded in his name direct his behavior: *nomen est omen*.

Furthermore, both Johnson's play and Tieck's novel call attention to the expressive relationship between name and character. In *The New Inn*, Prudence tells Lovel, for instance, „Do your endeavours, in the name of Love.“<sup>22</sup> In another scene, the characters find Lovel's name insufficiently expressive, and they inquire as to its exact meaning:

*Host.* But is your name Love-ill, sir, or Love-well?

I would know that.

*Lovel.* I do not know't myself

Whether it is. [...] <sup>23</sup>

Tieck's novel also hints self-reflexively at the relationship between name and character, but in his case, the heavy-handed humor works as a subtle joke, since the *sprechende Name* Lovell, in his novel, „speaks“ only in a foreign tongue. In the first letter of the novel, Karl Wilmont describes Lovell to his friend Mortimer, and he also describes his own affection for Burton's sister:

Sei nur ruhig, ich werde nie in die Grube fallen, die sich Lovell gegraben hat!

Ich habe mir ernsthaft vorgenommen, daß es keine *Liebe* werden soll, – denn, – sieh, wie schön das zusammenhängt! – denn mein Vermögen ist gegen das ihrige viel zu geringe. –

Du lachst? – Und würde die Welt nicht über Dich lachen, wenn Du den Zusammenhang hier vermißtest? – (14)

The first clue of the connection between Love-Il and love comes with the italicization of *Liebe*, which makes this word stand out and marks it as a proper name, since most names in the novel are italicized. Then, Wilmont interrupts his thought to implore his friend to see how nicely „that“ hangs together. Could Wilmont's „that“ simply mean the hanging together, the continuity, of pecuniary relationships, as he lacks the fortune to court Burton's sister? Perhaps, but the hyphens pull this interjection out of the flow of thought, and the „denn“ on each side of the interjection brackets the effect it could have on the rest of the sentence. More likely is that Wilmont interrupts his thought to point out the bilingual play of Lovell and *Liebe*. Because his statement continues on the same word that precedes the interjection, one senses that the interjection might not comment on the thought that is to come but rather that it expresses the sudden aperçu of a humorous

<sup>22</sup> Ben Johnson: *The New Inn*, hg. v. Michael Hattaway. Manchester 1984, III.ii.56.

connection in the preceding thought. Remember that these letters are supposedly written in English, which makes his pun on Lovell and love much more obvious – at least at the level of fiction. It does hang together nicely, for when Wilmont assures his friend, „daß es keine *Liebe* werden soll,“ he simultaneously implies, „daß [er] kein[] [*Love*-ll] werden soll.“ Finally, the laughter at the end of the passage confirms that there is a joke embedded in the preceding sentences. The joke would be on us, indeed, were we to take the characters' complaints of empty names and words at face value, missing this direct connection between a name and a character's central attribute.

This passage offers but one salient example of a thread that runs throughout the story: The narrative consistently identifies Lovell with love, not only thematically, in that he has many amorous affairs, but also linguistically, through the same kind of connections at work in Wilmont's letter. Later in the story, the girl named „Ferdinand“ (an example of a name that disguises identity, more specifically, gender) says to Lovell, „In diesem Zustande sah ich Sie, Lovell, und ein Gefühl, wie ich es noch nie gekannt hatte, bemächtigte sich meiner. Es war die Liebe, die mir bis dahin fremd geblieben war“ (578). Lovell embodies an emotion, love, and it is only natural that, upon seeing the person, she immediately recognizes the emotion he conveys. And when Lovell (disguised now under the pseudonym Anthonio, lest his true intentions be apparent) finally seduces Rosaline, he closes his blissful letter to Rosa with the sentence, „Noch nie hab' ich mich so darüber gefreut, daß ich Lovell bin“ (289).<sup>24</sup> Thematically, Lovell is most happy to be himself when he is most in love, and semantically, this third-person reference to oneself would make less sense were it delivered by Wilmont or Burton.

Tieck takes more than just a name from Johnson. He also takes a relationship between name and character (which, admittedly, is unique neither to Johnson nor, in Tieck's oeuvre, to this particular novel), and, finally, he takes over the narrative's self-reflexive highlighting of that relationship. With all this play between English and German, it is ironic that the novel's first critics accused Tieck of plagiarizing an English work. A reviewer writing for the Jena *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in 1797 states:

<sup>23</sup> Ben Johnson (Anm. 22), I.vi.95-97.

<sup>24</sup> Lovell's pseudonym reinforces this pattern of naming, for it too is drawn from a literary source, a song, „welches mich [...] zuerst auf die Idee meiner Verkleidung führte, und aus dem ich sogar meinen Namen Antonio entlehnt habe“ (272). He chooses the name because its connotations in cultural consciousness correspond to the attributes he adopts. The effect is not lost on Rosaline, who sings for him the same song, as Lovell reports, „weil es ihr so passend auf mich schien“ (272).

Das ganze Werk sieht übrigens einer Uebersetzung eines mittelmäßigen englischen Originals gleich, obschon der Titel nichts davon sagt. Diese Muthmaßung wird durch einige Stellen bestätigt, die einer nur zu buchstäblichen (!) Uebersetzung ähnlich sehen.<sup>25</sup>

This critic then points out specific passages in Tieck's novel that must be poor translations from English because they do not sound German enough. The review notes, for instance, „Was ein *breiter* Scherz seyn solle, wird mancher Leser bey B. II. S. 15 fragen, aber vielleicht ist das Wort *flat* nur unrichtig übersetzt.“<sup>26</sup> The claim that one can detect translated plagiarism in those expressions that deviate from idiomatic German becomes laughable when one realizes that Tieck *does not* translate what he borrows from English. He leaves the English word in the text and juxtaposes it with its German equivalent. Through a series of subtle hints, he underscores the direct link between name and character.

The charge that Tieck translates from English too literally also misses its mark. At Tieck's request, A.W. Schlegel wrote a response for the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, defending him against the dual charges of poor translation and plagiarism. He refutes them in the same order, assuring the critic and the public „1. daß der Verf. ein großer Kenner der englischen Sprache, 2. daß der Lovell ein deutsches Original ist.“<sup>27</sup> In fact, Tieck does not adhere too closely to the letter of his English source, and he makes Lovell a „German original“ through a wordplay that requires a firm grasp of the English language. In Johnson's *The New Inn*, the character is Herbert Lovel, the first name also being expressive because it connotes his military background.<sup>28</sup> Tieck obviously did not literally copy this character into his novel: He changed the first name to William and added an „l“ to the last name. (Even if one disregards Johnson's play as a source of the name, „Lovel“ with only one „l“ is still the more common form, and Tieck also had to choose a first name for his character.) In its final form, „William Lovell,“ the double „l“ at the end of the name echoes the double „l“ within the first name. They stand like quotation marks surrounding part of the name, and what they quote is not just an Eng-

<sup>25</sup> *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, Nr. 337 (23 October 1797), reproduced in Münz's edition of William Lovell, 706 f.

<sup>26</sup> Ebd.

<sup>27</sup> *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung. Intelligenzblatt*, Nr. 14 (24 January 1798), reproduced in Münz's edition of William Lovell, 708 f.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Hattaway, editor of *The New Inn*, notes that Herbert means „bright-warrior“ and derives from the Old High German *Heriberht*, meaning „bright army.“ Ben Johnson (Anm. 22), 57, note 7.

lish word but an English sentence: Will *i am Love* II. The name of Tieck's character thus pronounces his identity directly: I am love. The idea of quotation marks around this „sentence“ is not so far-fetched either, since using an expressive name to announce its character's identity is itself a kind of literary citation.

To be fair to Tieck's critics, it should be noted that there *is* a passage in his novel that reads like a too-literal translation of English. At one point, Lovell saves Amalie from a burning house (from a fire that he had a hand in starting). As Amalie depicts the scene of her rescue to her friend Emilie, she writes, „Ich wußte nicht, ob ich träumte, oder wachte; der Fremde, der mich gerettet hatte, schloß mich in seine Arme – ich bin *Lovell*! keuchte er mir mit erstickter Stimme entgegen“ (481). The only thing this anti-hero can communicate to his former beloved is a partial translation of what his name has always said, „ich bin *Lovell*.“ He can only say that he is an instantiation of love. Another partial translation of „I am love“ occurs in the passage, „Noch nie hab' ich mich so darüber gefreut, daß *ich Lovell bin*“ (289, emphasis added). In each case, an element within the character's designation becomes an attribute associated with that character. The specific figure for what occurs in Lovell's name is an *adnominatio*, in which one takes a proper name for its literal, paronomastic meaning.

Because the sentence, „I am Love,“ is concealed within the name and dispersed over both its halves, one could describe it as a kind of hypogram (sub-text) in Ferdinand de Saussure's sense of that term: The character's *signature* is simultaneously an *allusion* and one that underlines the *features of his face*.<sup>29</sup> It should be stressed that, even if Saussure's examples are more intricate, his method of reading for cryptographically dispersed names in Latin poetry accords entirely with the early Romantic notion of wordplay and its concomitant mode of reading. When August Wilhelm Schlegel lectures on Petrarch, for example, he instructs the reader to attend to „die leisesten Beziehungen, z.B. Ähnlichkeit im Laute des Namens,“<sup>30</sup> as when Petrarch subtly alludes to his beloved Laura. According to Schlegel, „Es ist daher nicht eine seltsame Spielerei, sondern strenge Wahrheit, wenn er den Namen seiner Geliebten durch *l'aura* andeutet: sie war seinem

<sup>29</sup> Consult Jean Starobinski: *Les mots sous les mots*. Paris 1971, 30 f. Saussure explains his choice of the term „hypogramme“ by giving the following meanings, besides signature: „soit *faire allusion*; soit *reproduire par écrit* comme un notaire, un secrétaire, soit même (si l'on songeait à ce sens special mais répandu) souligner au moyen du fard les traits du visage.“

<sup>30</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel: *Geschichte der romantischen Literatur*. Stuttgart 1965, 204.

Gemüte der leise Hauch, die erquickende Frühlingsluft innerer Belebung.“<sup>31</sup> These passages from his lecture support two important points: First, readers in Schlegel's circle were attuned to precisely the kind of encoded names and allusions that Tieck employs, and second, they recognized such homophones as the aural manifestation of an underlying affinity. Wordplay becomes word-truth in Schlegel's statement: Laura really is *l'aura*, a breeze or breath of air. The wordplay underlines her essential features. Tieck's novel assumes an even more radical position, though; it calls into question the very notion of an essential truth prior to phonetic play.

Paul de Man pushes the Saussurean hypogram in this direction when he relates it to *prosopopeia*, the trope of personification, which, in his interpretation, means „to give a face and therefore implies that the original face can be missing or nonexistent.“<sup>32</sup> De Man's definition is suggestive for reading Tieck's novel because here, too, it is never clear that Lovell possesses a face (a character, a self) prior to his name. The same structure is apparent in the passage from *Peter Lebrecht*, when he sets out, „ohne genau zu wissen, wer ich sei; nur mit dem Namen *Lebrecht* ausgestattet, der [...] mir doch immer als Vorschrift dienen konnte [...].“<sup>33</sup> The name serves as a *Vor-schrift*: It does not describe identity but rather prescribes it. It acts in the absence of identity as the *script* that comes *before*. In both cases, the name person-ifies the character by giving him his face. It produces the person through the word, just as the name Lovell circumscribes the character Lovell.

## V. The Malleable Character

Although the characters repeatedly assert that language is a meaningless game, that it is the „unsinnigste Spielerei“ itself (208), one finds in *William Lovell* a meaningful wordplay not so different from that of „Der blonde Eckbert.“<sup>34</sup> The connection between Lovell and love is,

<sup>31</sup> Ebd. Schlegel also gives an example of Petrarchan wordplay that moves in the opposite direction, from name to thing (*adnominatio*), as when *Colonna* occurs in conjunction with an empirical column.

<sup>32</sup> Paul de Man: Hypogram and Inscription. In: *The Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis 1986, 27-53, here 44.

<sup>33</sup> Ludwig Tieck: *Werke*. Bd. I, 82.

<sup>34</sup> One could also adduce the name *Walter Lovell*, which refers to the same character as „der alte Lovell.“ The novel and the tale employ the same name correspondence (Walther-Alte).

however, more than a clever play on words that highlights Tieck's language skills. Because Tieck situates it in a context of empty names and inadequate language, the expressive name subverts the prevalent discourse of linguistic crisis as it is articulated by the novel's characters (and as it has been taken up by critical reception).<sup>35</sup> Letters in the novel repeatedly complain that words do not correspond to things, but the example of *William Lovell* indicates a direct correspondence between words and things. The novel's central question, „Und wer bin ich denn?“ thus represents far less of a crisis when the name provides a simple response: „ich bin *Lovell*“ (638/481). The name solves the riddle of identity because the word itself determines identity.

Despite the claim that the self can never be present within language, *Lovell* shows that the self can never be *outside* of language. We find not an insurmountable gap between surface and depth, *Schein* and *Sein*, but rather a character that is *pure* surface: It derives from the words already embedded in the name, just as *Sein* is already present within *Schein*. The novel's imagery of imprisonment makes more sense from this perspective: The character is confined within the connotations of its name. *William Lovell* suggests this way of reading when he asks, „Bin ich nicht in diesem Namen, in diesem Laut eingekerkert, daß meine Seele nach ihrem Besitz und nach Freiheit schmachtet?“ (199). He refers here to the name *Amalie*, but the point remains the same: Names are spaces within which one is incarcerated. *Lovell*'s question furthermore underscores the phonetic quality, the „Laut,“ of the name. His name sounds like „love,“ a word sufficient to sound the depth of his character. And if we listen to the sound of other names, as well, we see that *Lovell* really is trapped within the sound of the name. After his romance with *Amalie* fails and he returns to England, he replaces her with *Emilie*, the closest phonetic ersatz for the name he must possess.

The function of the name in *William Lovell* is therefore completely removed from the „leere Namen“ and „hohles Wort“ of which the characters complain (364/309). In fact, it seems that it is not the word that is empty but rather its referent: The word takes precedence over the referent, steers it and determines it. If words cannot capture an emotion, it is because there is no emotion prior to the word that produces it. This is especially clear when *Lovell* seduces *Emilie* by telling her his story of suffering. He reports the scene to his friend:

<sup>35</sup> In addition to the works already cited, Alan Corkhill's „Perspectives on Language in Ludwig Tieck's Epistolary Novel *William Lovell*,“ in: *German Quarterly* 58/2 (1985), 173-183, traces the same theme. He finds in the novel a ubiquitous „linguistic skepticism“ (176).

Nie, Rosa, habe ich so gut gesprochen, und nie so tief empfunden. [...] Ach was ist Wahrheit und Überzeugung im Menschen! Ich war jetzt von allem überzeugt, was ich da sagte, ich war schwermütig und in sie verliebt, ich hätte mich wirklich in diesem Augenblicke ermorden können. (439)

One should note, first, the order of Lovell's statement: His powerful speech precedes his deep feeling. Indeed, the former brings the latter about, as it is his own rhetoric that persuades him into his emotions. Where is the incommunicable truth (*Wahrheit*) of the self in this scene? It seems that the truth of the self only comes about in the act of communication, just as the name precedes and produces the character type.

The cynical take on language – as meaningless wordplay – overlooks the force that an utterance delivers. When rhetoric determines essence, the deployed word takes on a power independent of its referent. That is, once identity is circumscribed by a name, or an emotion is nothing more than a word, then these names and words are adequate substitutes for the things they represent (effect); they can act in their place. William Lovell writes to Rosa: „Ich nenne mir manchmal den Namen *Amalie* oder *Rosaline*, um alles, wie mit einem Zauberspruche, wieder zum Leben zu erwecken [...]“ (358). The name in general has the power to bring something into being. Its utterance, like that of a magical incantation, produces an effect in the world. The name Lovell also elicits affect, usually hatred, in other characters. Karl Wilmont writes: „Sein Name brennt schmerzhaft in meiner Brust, wenn ich ihn nur durch einen Zufall nennen höre“ (467). And Andrea, under the heading „Haß,“ recalls of Lovell Sr., „Ich konnte nicht an seinen Namen denken, ohne vor Wut zu zittern [...]“ (623). The name produces the same effect that the person's presence would. Wilmont hates Lovell because he seduced Emilie (whom Wilmont planned to marry) and persuaded her to elope with him. Thus, his pain results from both Lovell's deed and the effect of remembering the „Love“ that it cost him. In Andrea's case, he hates Lovell Sr. (a grudge that structures the novel's entire plot) because they both tried to marry the same woman and Lovell Sr. won her hand. Again, the anger feeds not just on the person but also on the linguistic trace of what was lost to that person. The name conditions both the central character and the pre-established animosity into which he unwittingly steps.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Andrea's ultimate goal is to devastate Lovell Sr. by ruining his son. It is fitting that the revenge must travel across the son, who carries on the name Lovell and thereby the trace of Andrea's initial injury.

This analysis of the name casts new light on a long-running discussion of Lovell as a character without character. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Tieck's preface to the first volume reads: „Diese Geschichte hat vielleicht für diejenigen Leser einiges Interesse, die in einer Erzählung die *Charaktere* und ihre bestimmte Zeichnung für die Hauptsache halten“ (8). One tends to find in the critical reception, however, the conviction that Tieck portrays his characters indistinctly. Lovell, for example, does not know who he is (what kind of character he is), a defect that makes him an easy target for Andrea's corrupting scheme.

Friedrich Schlegel, whose opinion of the novel oscillates between harsh criticism and comparisons with Goethe's work, takes up the note sounded by Tieck's preface and writes, „Der einzige Charakter im Lovell ist er selbst, ein Mensch ohne Charakter.“<sup>37</sup> Schlegel's paradoxical remark seems to run counter to Tieck's preface, an incongruity identical to the one Manfred Frank articulates when he asks, „Tiecks beste charakterologische Studie bringt also einen Menschen ohne Charakter zustande?“<sup>38</sup> Frank takes the answer to be yes, and the analysis of the name Lovell confirms his assessment: Schlegel's note does not criticize the work so much as it captures what is distinctive in Tieck's character portrayal. Tieck depicts characters without identity, characters whose identity is inscribed by an external force, such as the name Love-ll stamping itself onto the novel's eponym. Thus, the portrayal really is the „main thing“ in the novel, for it becomes a „bestimmende Zeichnung“ when the character repeatedly fulfills the prophecy of its own name. Frank agrees that Tieck's poetological considerations motivate the „Marklosigkeit“ of his characters.<sup>39</sup> Here, the power of the name foregrounds the powerlessness of an identity so malleable that it takes the shape of any linguistic marker attached to it.

## VI. Lovell, Criminal

One could counter this argument for the linguistic constitution of the self by pointing out that Lovell's character cannot be reduced to love. Language, that is, does not produce the character completely because the character's complexity exceeds what the name contains. The con-

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Schlegel: KA XVI, 129, Nr. 527.

<sup>38</sup> Manfred Frank: Das Problem Zeit in der deutschen Romantik. München <sup>2</sup>1972, 295.

<sup>39</sup> Frank (Anm. 38), 295



notations embedded in the name cannot account for Lovell's dark side – his tendency toward jealousy, bitterness, deceit, and vengeance. Hence, on this view, there must remain an essential self in excess of its linguistic determinants.

I submit, however, that what appears to contradict the evidence of the name actually reiterates that structure in a somewhat different form. In this case, a different *Vor-schrift* acts in advance of identity – not the name but the figures used to illuminate the self. We noted that the novel's most common metaphors are criminality and its related themes of incarceration, chains, and punishment. The mysterious group centered around Andrea frequently applies these to the self to illustrate its structure as an insurmountable gap between expression and essence. Through the course of the story, though, Lovell can only enact and literalize these figures for the self, so that here, too – despite the claim of linguistic inadequacy – it is a linguistic marker that shapes his identity. The group corrupts the character by first corrupting his language.

Rosa employs the following psychological simile in a letter to Lovell, „[...] und so wie der Mörder den noch halbbelebten Leichnam ängstlich mit Erde bedeckt, so verscharren wir mutwillig Empfindungen, die sich in uns zum Bewußtsein emporarbeiten wollen“ (325). Rosa's comparison returns to a bifurcation of the self, similar to what Borgards identifies in the novel, although here the split does not fall between body and soul but rather between consciousness and the unconscious. In this conception, the self is that which actively prevents its own discovery. Its essence remains a riddle because the conscious, writing self kills and conceals those feelings that should not rise to the surface. Rosa thus offers a pre-psychoanalytic image of the conflict between the conscious and unconscious layers of the psyche. It should be stressed that this figure of criminality brings one no closer to the nature of the fugitive self. It only reiterates the self's structure as something that conceals, withholds, and furtively strives to delay its own discovery. Its tenor is thus the same disjunction between exterior signification and interior essence; the self appears once again as the absent center of discourse.

As William Lovell enters Andrea's group, he increasingly adopts its discourse of the criminal self. Indeed, his letters in the second half of volume two are replete with references to criminals, chains, bars, prisons, sentences, and executioners. For example, when he describes for Rosa his meeting with Andrea, he mirrors his friend's figure: „[...] so wie einem Verbrecher, der sich plötzlich in seinen widersprechenden Lügen gefangen fühlt, und dem nun das Wort im Mund erstarrt, – so

war mir in meinem Innern“ (340-1). In its end effect, the passage seeks to illuminate the inner self by referring it to the criminal, the one who can never expose what his face conceals. The self remains incommunicable, and one must compensate for the disjunction between words and truth with the approximations of figural language.

In both cases, the criminal is a figure of form: It continues to structure the self as a self-perpetuating absence in language. But, as the story shows through the effects of the name, language used formally – as in the indexical form of the name – can contaminate, even constitute the content of its referent. The form of Lovell's name becomes the content of his character. And in a similar leap, the figures for the form of the self (deception, disjunction) inscribe themselves as content upon the self. Lovell seems to take metaphor in its strong sense as „to transfer“ or „carry over.“ He first carries Rosa and Andrea's figures over to his own letters. Then he increasingly ignores the „wie“ in such statements, either explicit in simile or implicit in metaphor, and transfers the figures into reality.<sup>40</sup> Within the totalization of rhetoric, figures do not simply approximate an absent truth; they make their own truth.<sup>41</sup>

It is not surprising that, as Lovell literalizes and lives out these metaphors, he gradually embodies the criminal trying to evade capture and punishment. He literally becomes the murderer concealing a corpse – he first kills Pietro in a fight (over love, no less), but by the novel's end, he is responsible for at least five unnecessary deaths: besides Pietro, Rosaline (whom he betrayed), Willy (whom he poisoned), Comtesse Blainville (whom he caused to burn to death), and Emilie (whom he also betrayed). He furthermore becomes „gefangen“ in his own „widersprechenden Lügen“ at the plot-level when he is caught trying to insinuate himself into Burton's household in order to murder Eduard. When confronted with his lies and criminal intentions, Lovell cannot respond, which is to say, every utterance freezes

<sup>40</sup> Stanley Corngold emphasizes the strong sense of *metaphor* in an astute piece on the literalization of metaphor in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*. He describes this process as a shift from metaphor to name: „If the metaphor is taken out of context, however, if it is taken literally, it no longer functions as a vehicle but as a name, directing us to [the vehicle, the metaphor proper] as an abstraction or an object in the world.“ Stanley Corngold: *Metamorphosis of Metaphor*. In: Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form. Ithaca 1988, 55. My reading similarly tries to demonstrate how the metaphors of the fugitive self take on the same function as the name, both indexical and determinative.

<sup>41</sup> See Corkhill (Anm. 35), 181, where he notes that the flipside of linguistic skepticism is a celebration of language as „Eigenrealität,“ a notion that the novel asserts tentatively, in his view.

in his mouth. After Lovell's failed attempt on his life, Burton writes, „ich muß ihn noch in dieser Nacht fortzuschaffen suchen, um ihn den Gerichten und dem Gefängnisse zu entziehen“ (445). Lovell's identity as an empirical criminal is complete. The very metaphors used in place of a language proper become a more powerful language in that they direct essence. Lovell's „Marklosigkeit“ as a character remains his constant susceptibility to the linguistic determination of his identity.

## VII. Conclusion: Turning Points

The malleability of identity in *William Lovell* is suppressed by the prevalent discourse of a self impervious to language. However, the play of the name, along with the further instances of slippage from figure to deed, destabilizes this claim by uncovering a self permeated by language. The self's linguistic character surfaces in the text in subtle ways. Karl Wilmont attempts, for example, to distance himself from all forms of figural language:

[...] oratorische Wendungen, Tropen, Metaphern und alle Arten von Figuren hab' ich rein vergessen, und ich selber spiele hier an meinem Schreibpulte eine höchst armselige Figur, indem ich die Feder beiße und mir mit der linken Hand in den Kopf kratze, um mich zu besinnen, was ich Dir wohl zu sagen haben könnte. (69)

Wilmont's gesture of removing himself from figural language simultaneously situates him within it. It is clear that he has not forgotten all his tropes and figures, for his self-reflexive description of the scene of writing relies on a kind of „figural“ play. The line, „ich selber spiele [...] eine höchst armselige Figur,“ turns on the ambiguity of the word „figure.“ That is, his statement that he plays the part of a miserable character (or figure) is contaminated by its proximity to the list of rhetorical forms, and one cannot read this line without a reminder of the preceding sense of „figure.“ In other words, the claim of being free from all rhetorical forms is immediately followed and undermined by a gesture of being completely overtaken by rhetorical forms: The I itself is a miserable figure. The character one plays is circumscribed by the very tropes and metaphors from which it is supposedly absent.

Wilmont's reference to „oratorische Wendungen“ returns us to one of Lovell's earliest statements, a passage in which he says he is now attentive to „wie von einem kleinen Zufalle, von einer unbedeutenden Kleinigkeit oft die *Wendung unsers Charakters* abhängt“ (15, emphasis added; this letter directly follows the one from Wilmont that un-

derscores the connection between Lovell and *Liebe*). The word *Wendung* means a turn, primarily as in a turn of events, but also in the sense of a *trope*, or a *turn* of phrase – hence Wilmont's reference to oratorical expressions, *oratorische Wendungen*. The double sense of the „turn“ in Lovell's above passage unites the turn of phrase with the turn of events, and the novel at large links them in a causal relationship. The turn of phrase steers events in a particular direction; for Lovell, they veer off course. Both depend upon an „insignificant detail,“ and in William's case, this detail is the expressive coincidence embedded in his name. As we have seen in numerous examples, this bilingual play governs the expression (*Wendung*) of his character, but it simultaneously governs the turn of events (*Wendung*) for his character, because the character's turn of events depends on a small detail within a turn of phrase.

The characters' letters never state this openly, and one has to read against the grain of their lamentations to find the very kind of word-play they deride. Here, as in „Eckbert,“ it is only by attending closely to each „unbedeutenden Kleinigkeit“ that one uncovers what the narrative itself would withhold. Behind the façade of a self impervious to the play of language lies a self contingent upon it. The discourse of the self as riddle asserts that something exists beyond language; it turns the inability to say definitively what the self is (besides something unsayable) into a problem of inadequate language rather than a problem of selflessness. By casting the self as a riddle, the characters plead for its profound, incommunicable essence. It turns out, however, that the solution is already present, embedded within the riddle's signifiers. That is, if the name William Lovell is forever detached from the essence of a self, then the signifier substitutes for the missing self by constructing his identity out of it-self. He *is* love and nothing but love until a new turn of phrase inscribes itself upon his character. Words replace things because there is nothing to indicate that such a thing as a self or a character was present prior to the word that produced it. The name is what gives Lovell his „face“ in the first place.

In this sense, the epistolary novel is a perfect medium for representing the linguistic constitution of the self, for it includes, strictly speaking, no characters, no poles at which language either originates or arrives. It consists only of the medium of exchange, the transfer of language, and one then constitutes character positions on the basis of linguistic exchange.<sup>42</sup> Can one really take the characters at their word

<sup>42</sup> William Lillyman also writes on the necessity of the novel's epistolary form, although he sees it differently. I cannot agree with his reading when he grounds this

and try to read *Lovell* as the portrait of an inexpressible self? As Wilmont asks in the first letter of the novel: „Und würde die Welt nicht über Dich lachen, wenn Du den Zusammenhang hier vermißtest?“ (14). It should laugh were we to miss the primacy of linguistic play over the stable essence of a self – a primacy that the story indicates at every turn.

---

necessity in the crisis of language and the incommunicable self. For Lillyman, Lovell's story could never be told from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator, „since nobody else can know his essence.“ Lillyman: Reality's Dark Dream. Berlin 1978, 25.